

## READING THE EXPERIMENTAL LITERARY FORM AND PROGRESSIVE POLITICAL VISION IN 'A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN'

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### ABSTRACT

*One fine morning, like every day, begins with the news which shakes all rational set-up of the mind of the modern man, so to say in the prevalent academic discourse rather the mind of the postmodern man. Nothing seems changing in the world, but nothing remains unchanging on its place put ever. Everything has been poking the human conscience and posing questions to a logical mind at acute level. This is almost the same disturbing day if not exactly like him or could be said one of those days of Joyce's character in his written novel, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Stephen who is searching for a proper, permanent and peaceful refuse against the wish of her mother by not offering the duty on the Easter.*

*My disturbing day begins from the outer or externally existing tradition of belief or faith with a newspaper when the most celebrated newspaper of the country publishes the news of an Easter day:*

*"Technology sans God is dangerous: Pope' (heading of the news) Vatican City: Pope Benedict XVI, leading the world's Catholics into Easter, said technological progress, in the absence of awareness of God and moral values, posed a threat to the world. The Pope presided at a solemn Easter vigil Mass in St. Peter's Basilica to usher the 1.2 billion member church into the most important day of its liturgical calendar."(1)*

*Joyce's character, Stephen had strongly disturbing day obviously more, rather unparallel in resembling experience:*

*"-Cranly, I had an unpleasant quarrel this evening.*

*-With your people? Cranly asked.*

*-With my mother.*

*-About religion?*

*-Yes, Stephen answered. After a pause Cranly asked:*

*-What age is your mother? -Not old, Stephen said. She wishes me to make my easter duty.*

*-And will you?*

*-I will not, Stephen said.*

*-Why not? Cranly said.*

*-I will nopt serve, answered Stephen. -that remark was made before, Cranly said calmly.*

*-it is made behind now, said Stephen hotly."(2)*

*( A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man V, 259-260 ).*

**KEYWORDS:** Vatican City, Pope Benedict XVI & Joyce's character

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## INTRODUCTION

I see here one thing which is common to both of these situations, the problem of rationality. There is one trouble put within the coat of the temporality and I would like to escape from saying spatiality, because there are alternate spaces created to exist indifferent to the dominating temporal experience now, which was, I think, at that time not so easy. The time has changed in different ways. The problem of theology has entered into the domain of the technology. As per these two different varieties of turning away from active participation in the religious affair either in terms of belief or practice, we resort to questioning existing religious ideas. The questions posed to religious belief with the due course of time have sharpened more with the day to day technological development which argues for the materialistic existence. From which Stephen has not been kept aloof and he is caught up within the swing of his own firm rational and material visibility against the traditional and religious invisibility and abstraction. He is very much a modern man bearing all of its elements.

In this novel, the problem of Stephen is very much intact within rationalistic and progressive ideas in confrontation of the existing form of the society or the world he lives into. He is very perturbed because of his ideas which do not set to the persisting ideas.

The literary critic Derek Attridge writes about this work of Joyce as “One of the most remarkable events in the history of literary creativity occurred when James Joyce composed opening pages of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, pages that move from the earliest remembered experiences of Stephen Dedalus to a particularly memorable fever-ridden day during his first term at Clongowes Wood College.”(3)

Attridge clearly points out the technique which presents the literary form which is a result of the experiment and this style contains the political progressive vision of a character which is the product of such society drawn in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. It is read as a text which understands the technique of rhythm of development through historicity of the time and space.

Stephen is a character which undergoes through emerging tensions and contradiction of materiality and the unspoken burden of the morality rooted in the everyday practices of life. This novel is also very important, because it provided the base to one of the masterpieces, most quoted literary text of modern period,, *Ulysses*, about which Attridge says, “when we meet Stephen again in *Ulysses*, Joyce's new technique of interior monologue- a development of the opening and closing sections of *A Portrait*- gives us access to a mental world that possesses a linguistic and cultural richness (and humor) well beyond anything in the earlier novel.”(4)

Though there are many understandings would have come up to read it as a modern novel, but even then I would like to give three major ways to engage with problems of modernity as depicted in the novel. These could be three major ways of reading it as per my understanding

### Which are Discussed Below

- Linguistic and language inclinations,
- Going beyond the boundary of a fixed language identity,
- The temporality and spatiality of modernity in terms of religious practices, material provocations and sexuality

within the moral framework.

These three points are entrusted with potential to unfold the contribution of the literary form promoting the political progressive vision interacting with experiments done in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

The first way of reading tells about the engagement of the literary form clad with unique linguistic elements and the way language has been shown being used to disclose how the formation of idea is set up or penetrates in the learner's mind paving a way to understand the complexity of present time in the given historical situation being depicted very much in the character of Stephen. It is an unusual record of literary form being used while writing any kind of literary account which has been used in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. There are two techniques that I would prefer to suggest being the student of linguistics, here in this section. One is a portion of precise linguistic element which is in the words of Attridge is "onomotopoeic qualities" which comes up with imagination of a sound along with what is written in the printed form. Though Attridge says that "ugliness does not in here in the sounds of a language (5)" (Attridge 2000) but we see he does not deny that there is no involvement of linguistic element here. And the second, that I employ here, is of 'definitional objective'. Joyce does not only let his protagonist come across the word like "suck, kiss, sin", and all such words about which anybody would turn very inquisitive to know at that tender age of Stephen for whom the language has yet not been loaded with its social, cultural and moral meaning which is very much seen reflecting in politics. The political vision is not at all bereft of all these progressive process which takes place in continuum in every time and space. This deliberate exclusion of the regular meaning from its word in a language and putting it in some other context or sometimes defining it, conducts the process of being politically progressive in vision in coming life through such literature. The second major way of reading demands very meticulous attention. The language discourse is not limited either to its own narrative or its language identity but it gave us a way and courage to identify and acknowledge the other languages existing parallel in other culture irrespective of the concern that whether that culture or language is in the dominant discourse or the part of it. There is a way out in such descriptions which is an implicit description of the recognition of other ideas through its language which has penchant for equal treatment being provided to all language and culture by everyone. The narrative of such an account as in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young*

#### **Man is as Follows**

"-What funnel ?asked Stephen.

-The funnel through which you pour the oil into your lamp.

-That ? Said Stephen. Is that called a funnel? Is it not a tundish?

-What is a tundish ? -That. The... the funnel.

-Is that called a tundish in Ireland ? Asked the dean. I never heard the word in my life. -It is called a tundish in Lower Drumcondra, said Stephen laughing, where they speak the best English.

-A tundish, said the dean reflectively. That is a most interesting word. I must look that word up. Upon my word i must."(6)

This narrative is though not seems quote noticed and oft-quoted while discussing either the literary form or as a mark of the progressive ideas, but I think that this is most powerful literary form to advocate or address the issue of identity which begins from the language to the concept of nation-state formation. This form of writing had the power of addressing

the problem of war, which has hardly ever been avoided when any new territory has to undergo the process of nation-state formation. And in the modern period and in the colonial history, the identity of language has always been put into disadvantaged position being ignored which later on provided the major argument or in a way the base of the most famous and first book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, by Benedict Anderson (7), which talks about nation-state formation in the modern time. The unique experimental literary form of such a modern text had been ammunitioned with the power of prediction of problems like war and nationalism traced into the fragmentariness of language which was the most political progressive vision without which, I think, there could be no kind study either in humanities or in social sciences conducted which will make any further headway. And fairly well, the narrative has the mark where the dean agrees to acknowledge the language of other culture avoiding any form of resistance to prevailing ideas, all around, through language.

The third and equally prominent way of reading modernism is not something which is very unique, but it is so common that it poses a severe challenge to all pre-existing ideas and belief in interaction with modernity. I would take example here for explaining two set of different ideas which would try to establish the communication between each other in the time and space either of the historical situation or in the present time, in other words, this confrontation given below to open up the discourse of modernity with the 'real human practices and existence' would remain always the same.

The first set of different ideas is religious practices and material provocations. This has to be used as pattern or system of understanding the modernity and its challenge to religious practices in continuity as in the past and also has to be taken as how there is a sudden interruption of material provocation appears acceptable bringing a kind of logical rupture in practice of religion, one of the most complex problem of modernity for any religion in equal manner. There is quote from a paragraph as an example to what has been discussed above:

“... If a layman in giving baptism pours the water before saying the words is the child baptized? Is baptism with a mineral water valid?...Why was the sacrament of the eucharist instituted under the two species of bread and wine, if Jesus Christ be present body and blood, soul and divinity, in the bread alone and in the wine alone? Does a tiny particle of the consecrated bread contain all the body and blood of Jesus Christ or a part only of the body and blood? If the wine change into vinegar and the host crumble into corruption after they have been consecrated is Jesus Christ still present under their species as God and as man?”(8).

This idea questions directly the practice of religion in the modern period, where a modern man wants to practice the religion as it is supposed, but his conscience which are very much material and conscience does not let him do so, because it seeks a kind of conviction to principles religion is said to be based on. Though he falls into it later on, in this novel, for some time but not with absolute acceptance rather stiff resistance against his will and finally dismisses every religious faith being transformed or abused sometimes as 'atheist'. There has also been challenge shaking the moral foundation while discussing the sexuality within the moral framework which is promisingly based on the religion. We can see how modern man questions the setting of the false moral encircled absurd understanding of sexuality:

“He came. He was born of a virgin pure, Mary the virgin mother.”(9) This religious belief do not take human or natural science in its consideration, which is an urge to the modernity and so will remain for the modern man. In the other example, we see the same shaky ground of religion in the modern era:

“- Keep your icon. If we must have a Jesus, let us have a legitimate Jesus.”(10) The same kind of problem arises

here that how the progressive rationality has been located in the imagery taken from the myth as one of the experimental literary which could not obviously be understood in isolation to each other. The building or formation of a modern man is seen in religious sections trying to search the ideal person which could not be found after all. The modern man is the creation of monopolistic material sanctions which stand against the religious regime. The modern literature or the literature in modernist era would bear the reflection of the imagery taken from our religious myth as experimental literary form whose confrontation with modernity in normative relation will grow up in the politicized progressive vision of the modern man.

## CONCLUSIONS

Literature has had several genres, but the idea of reason lies in the little things of our everyday life. It comprises the idea of banality. The banal instinct gets enlivened merely through the experiment in our life.

'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man' represents the idea, to the core, as how the reflections of banality could be transformed through the language. Its language requires the consciousness of boredom prevailing around us. The reality of the realization cannot be explored in the hustle bustle of ideas. The experimental form and the progressive political vision cannot be realized without the internalizing the reflection of normative relation between life and its banality. Joyce has succeeded to do the same in this text which is going to be read in all times but getting the idea of its progressive vision preserved through the ages.

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